

# Rebel with a Cause: The (Im)Morality of Imagawa Ryoshun

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## Rebel with a Cause: The (Im)Morality of Imagawa Ryōshun

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This essay examines the dissonance between contemporary accounts of Imagawa Ryōshun's activities and the later Tokugawa period image of him as exemplar of warrior values. A critical of contemporary sources reveals that his is an altogether different image: that of rebel. While Ryōshun sacrificed twenty-five years of his life attempting to subjugate the island of Kyushu for the Ashikaga, things turned sour when his enemies slandered him to Ashikaga Yoshimitsu, who summarily dismissed him from the post of Kyushu *tandai*. Yoshimitsu's absolutism brought him into conflict with other powerful warlords like Ōuchi Yoshihiro and Ashikaga Mitsukane, both of whom in the end plotted rebellion. While Ryōshun disavowed any participation in the plot, it is reasonably clear that he did participate, if only tacitly, and even mustered troops before surrendering and ending his life in political exile. In order to justify his betrayal, he seems to have relied on ideas from *Mencius* to suggest that Yoshimitsu was an immoral ruler whose profligacy demanded reign change. *Mencius* gave him the opportunity to argue that the Ashikaga family was worthy of rule but that Yoshimitsu was not. In other words, Ryōshun remained loyal to the Ashikaga house, not the individual ruling it, a position more in line with Tokugawa ideas on loyalty than his own. His stance on reign change, however, was dangerous for the Tokugawa, who were concerned with maintaining control of the warrior class. Accordingly, Ryōshun's betrayal was forgotten or ignored, leaving the image of paragon to posterity.

**Keywords:** Nanbokuchō, Ashikaga Yoshimitsu, Ōuchi Yoshihiro, Ōei Disturbance, *Nan Taiheiki*, Imagawa Letter, *Mencius*, Confucianism, loyalty, Kyushu *tandai*

One of the greatest generals and poets of the fourteenth century, Imagawa Ryōshun 今川了俊 (1326–1420?) has been considered a warrior of outstanding virtue, especially during the Tokugawa period (1603–1868).<sup>1</sup> This image comes primarily from his renown as a Confucian intellectual and the acclaim his *Imagawa jō* 今川状 (Imagawa Letter, hereafter referred to as the *Letter*) received. Other evidence, however, complicates that image—specifically, his

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1 Ryōshun's given name was Sadayo 貞世, but he took the former name following the death of the second Ashikaga shogun Yoshiakira 足利義詮 in 1367. For more on Ryōshun as an exemplar of Tokugawa ethics, see Steenstrup 1973, pp. 296–98.

tacit involvement in an uprising against Ashikaga Yoshimitsu 足利義満 (1358–1408). Ryōshun as rebel is at odds with the aforementioned image, but only if we assume that ethics and loyalty are synonymous.

During the Tokugawa period ethical behavior and loyalty were to some extent synonymous, but no such ideal obtained during Ryōshun's time, when a fundamental contradiction governed the relationship between lord and follower: the more effective and independent the warrior, the more likely he was to turn on his lord when presented with a better opportunity.<sup>2</sup> Ryōshun understood that peace required a shift in this relationship. This is evident in his attempt at creating stronger bonds of loyalty between the warriors of Kyushu and the Ashikaga shogunate during his twenty-five year sojourn in the southern isle. He appears to have understood that Japan was standing on the precipice of disaster—an erosion of the social bonds between warrior and central government that would result in widespread disorder—and sought to arrest that process via a rigid form of loyalty more resembling that which obtained during the Tokugawa era than his own. Indeed, one of the reasons he was seen by Tokugawa observers as ethical was precisely because his stance on loyalty was akin to that of the Tokugawa period.

To understand the inconsistency between the later image of Ryōshun and contemporary accounts of his life, I will focus on his version of two events as recorded in his *Nan Taiheiki* 難太平記 (Criticisms of *Taiheiki*). The first is his appointment to the office of Kyushu *tandai* 探題 in 1370. The second is his dismissal from that post in 1395 and subsequent involvement in the Ōei Disturbance of 1399. Despite Ryōshun's twenty five years spent subjugating Kyushu for the Ashikaga, his work bred mistrust among the independent warlords (*tozama* 外様) there. He was eventually slandered and recalled to Kyoto. This paper will show that the actualities of Ryōshun's life were far more ambiguous than the lofty opinions held of him in later ages would suggest.

One of those ambiguities I wish to explore concerns Ryōshun's motives for participating in a rebellion against Yoshimitsu. A fundamental conservatism was at the heart of his decision to rebel. Ryōshun, like many of his peers, shared the belief that good government should resemble the dual polity, or *kōbu seiken* 公武政權, of the Kamakura period. The third shogun Yoshimitsu, however, departed from his forebears and sought to become an autocratic power in his own right, putting him at odds with men like Ryōshun



Figure 1. Portrait of Imagawa Ryōshun, from *Zenken kojitsu* 前賢故実 by Kikuchi Yōsai 菊池容斎.

<sup>2</sup> See chapter 5, Conlan 2003; Friday 1996.

who had spent their lives fighting for the Ashikaga under the assumption that they would play a role in establishing and governing a new shogunate.

This paper will explore the reasons behind Ryōshun's rebellious attitude and the contradictions that occurred as a result: his actions in Kyushu were meant to prevent disorder, but they were in fact a harbinger of it.<sup>3</sup> Not only is this interesting on the micro level, but on the macro level it is also germane to our understanding of the ebbs and flows of the fourteenth century and, more broadly, to the continuities that define Japan's history.

### A Note on *Nan Taiheiki* and the Imagawa Letter

The title *Nan Taiheiki*'s implies it is a criticism of the fourteenth century war tale *Taiheiki* 太平記 (Chronicle of Great Peace), which records Emperor Go-Daigo's 後醍醐天皇 (1288–1339) failed Kenmu Restoration of 1333–36 and the subsequent rise of the Ashikaga. However, there are problems with this assumption, not least that Ryōshun himself likely did not supply the title.<sup>4</sup> The title has led readers to assume that the work's purpose is a general critique of *Taiheiki* when in actuality its author is critical of its omissions regarding the roles of his father Imagawa Norikuni 今川範国 (1294–1384) and brother Noriuji 範氏 in the Ashikaga's rise to power.<sup>5</sup> In other words, Ryōshun believed it was his duty to rectify the historical record regarding his family, not simply to tear down a work that he considered important for remembering warrior deeds.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, regardless of the nature of his criticism, the fact that he even bothered to write *Nan Taiheiki* in the first place suggests the significance *Taiheiki* had in the collective warrior memory.

More significant perhaps is the last third of *Nan Taiheiki*. Here we find what appears to be the most important part of the text, Ryōshun's criticisms of Yoshimitsu. Ryōshun hoped to exonerate himself of the stigma of traitor that he incurred as a result of his subsequent participation in rebellion. To do so he embarked on a remonstrance of Yoshimitsu that relies on an unorthodox interpretation of rebellion. Understanding how he interpreted rebellion is essential to elucidating the reasons for the inconsistency between the image and the reality of Ryōshun's life.

Integral to that goal is Ryōshun's Imagawa Letter, a series of injunctions he purportedly sent to his younger brother (and later adopted son) Nakaaki 仲秋 to berate him for his maladministration of Suruga province. The *Letter* fit so well with Tokugawa rhetoric regarding loyalty and virtue that it helped fashion the image of Ryōshun as moral exemplar. Indeed, it even became standard reading for early-modern samurai, spawning a whole subset of educational literature.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, it is not even clear whether the *Letter* is Ryōshun's handiwork. Even if we assume that it is, the work does not advocate a new vision of ethics but rather represents the rise of the *bunbu ryōdō* 文武両道 ideal.<sup>8</sup> The *Letter's* maxims were easily applicable to a wide number of ethical issues, making it popular especially during the eighteenth century when warrior leaders sought to inculcate martial vigor and moral behavior

3 See chapter 5, Conlan 2003, esp. p. 164.

4 Takeda 1998, p. 80; Hanafusa 2009.

5 "Without question eighty or ninety percent of *Taiheiki* is false. The overall storyline is not wrong, but there are many falsehoods about the merit of various individuals" (Hasegawa 2006, p. 423).

6 Ichizawa 2002, p. 49.

7 Steenstrup 1973, pp. 295–96; note 9, p. 296.

8 See chapter 10, Hurst 1998b; Conlan 2011a.

in an increasingly dissipated warrior class.<sup>9</sup> Its universal nature allowed it to stand in for warrior morality, which contributed to the image of Ryōshun as exemplar of warrior ethics.

However, the *Letter* is not a general primer on loyalty or morality for warriors but a guide for governance and keeping the peace specific to Ryōshun's cultural and chronological milieu, and so we should be skeptical of reading it as representative of a novel or radical ideal of loyalty or ethics. On the other hand, the *Letter* is still useful, for if we posit it as at least representative of his ethics, we can see that he understood quite well the main issue plaguing the relationship between lords and followers—namely, the ease with which both parties were able to break bonds of fealty. In any event, the popularity of the *Letter*, with its easy-to-digest exhortations and rigid didactic tone, outstripped that of *Nan Taiheiki* and the inconsistencies it hinted at. The popularity of his *Letter*, and *Taiheiki*'s omission of the Imagawa's role in the Ashikaga's rise, both combined to help efface the nuances of Ryōshun's life, rendering him a one-dimensional icon of warrior morality that disregards the very nuances I will explore in this paper.

### Part 1: Imagawa Ryōshun—Poet in an Age of War

The Imagawa were staunch supporters of the Ashikaga throughout the Nanbokuchō period (1336–92), Ryōshun's father Norikuni serving as a general and administrator to the Ashikaga throughout. Ryōshun would follow suit, though we have very little in the way of details concerning his activities during his youth. Ryōshun shows up as a shogunal administrator in the 1360s as chief of the bureau of samurai (*samurai dokoro tōnin* 侍所当人) and chief of the council of adjudicators (*bikitsuke tōnin* 引付当人).<sup>10</sup> That decade was marked by the gradual solidification of authority under the second Ashikaga shogun Yoshiakira 足利義詮 (1330–67), who, before passing away in 1367, appointed Hosokawa Yoriyuki 細川頼之 (1329–92) shogunal regent (*kanrei* 管領) to Yoshiakira's young son Yoshimitsu who would become shogun a year later at the tender age of ten. It was a pivotal time for the shogunate insofar as any discontinuity of leadership would provide opportunities for resistance to its authority.

Enter Ryōshun, who by that time was an experienced general and administrator, not to mention a member of the Imagawa, a famous collateral family of the Ashikaga. Importantly, he was known primarily for his skill at and love of poetry, an important trait during the fourteenth century when the Ashikaga valued the possession of literary skill as highly as military skill for governance.<sup>11</sup> He embarked on a poetic career from a young age and was tutored by some of the era's greatest poetic minds, including *waka* and *renga* master Nijō Yoshimoto 二条良基; Ryōshun even had a poem included in the imperial poetry anthology *Fūga wakashū* 風雅和歌集 in 1346.<sup>12</sup> It is not far off the mark to suggest that poetry was his true calling and that he hoped to pursue it as a vocation while performing his administrative

9 Tokugawa Yoshimune 徳川吉宗 (1684–1751) sought to instill martial vigor in the samurai by ordering hunts and training exercises, much to the consternation of his peace-loving followers. Later, Matsudaira Sadanobu 松平定信 (1759–1829) harped on the term *bunbu ryōdō* so much that it became the subject of satirical verse. See Hurst 1998, pp. 142–43; Iwasaki 1983, pp. 18–19.

10 Kawazoe 1964, pp. 61–70.

11 Conlan 2011a, p. 123.

12 Ryōshun's parents saw the value of poetry, and his grandmother, Kaun'un, began instructing him around the age of twelve or thirteen to read poetry. Additionally, his youth was spent in the environs of Kamakura, where poets from the court frequently traveled. See Kawazoe 1964, pp. 30–33.

duties. In fact, his poetic renown was undoubtedly one of the major reasons his friend Yoriyuki appointed him to the office of Kyushu *tandai*. Ryōshun, it should be noted, did not disappoint, using poetry and his connections to the poetry salons of the capital as a means of creating alliances with Kyushu warriors.<sup>13</sup> His bloodline and experience combined with his literary talents made him the perfect tool for spreading Ashikaga authority to the rusticated island of Kyushu, a living bearer of civilization in an inhospitable land thirsty for culture.

Kyushu had proven a particularly stubborn obstacle to Ashikaga rule. Long resistant to central authority, it was riven by the squabbles of indigenous warriors unaccustomed to external leadership. The situation was further complicated by the presence of Southern Court partisans led by Prince Kaneyoshi 懷良親王 (1329?-83), one of Go-Daigo's oldest living sons. Kaneyoshi, who arrived but a child in Kyushu in 1336, had done an admirable job solidifying his authority there as he matured; indeed, the Ashikaga had tried four times to subjugate the island, with each attempt ending in failure.<sup>14</sup> While Kaneyoshi and warlords such as the Kikuchi and Shimazu proved stubborn foes, it is a testament to Ryōshun's political and military acumen that by the late 1380s he had subjugated most of the island.

Ryōshun's writings indicate that he was less than thrilled at the prospect of traveling to rural Kyushu, a place long on violence but short on literary talent. Moreover, since ancient times it had been the destination for individuals who were "awarded" positions in the imperial court's Kyushu outpost Dazaifu 太宰府 that in reality were forms of exile. His travel diary *Michiyukiburi* 道行きぶり (Meetings on the Road), written in 1371 as he traveled to Kyushu, aptly expresses his sorrow at having to leave the capital.<sup>15</sup> As the term *michiyuki* 道行き was associated with exile and death, use of that term and the lachrymose tone of the work both strongly suggest that he saw his mission as the death of his poetic aspirations.<sup>16</sup> His willingness to sacrifice his dream of a career in poetics for the sake of his Ashikaga overlords more than anything illustrates the nature of his ideas on loyalty, to which we now turn.

## Part 2: Building Bridges—Ryōshun, Kyushu, and Ashikaga Hegemony

Until Go-Daigo's Kenmu Restoration, warrior interests were tied inextricably to the hegemony of the imperial court, but with the fall of the Kenmu imperium in 1336 that imperial authority fragmented. And yet few if any warriors desired, let alone thought about, autonomy from the court. The Ashikaga, especially Takauji's younger brother Tadayoshi, struggled to reestablish central authority in the wake of Kenmu's fall, supporting the Jimyōin 持明院 imperial bloodline that gave them their legitimacy. The Kenmu formulary (*Kenmu shikimoku*

13 See chapter 7, Kawazoe 1964.

14 Kawazoe 1964, pp. 76–83; Conlan 2003, pp. 157–58.

15 It may be that Ryōshun is simply following the well-worn trope from court literature of expressing sadness when departing the capital, but such tropes were parts of an archive that medieval Japanese drew on to aid them in expressing themselves. In any event, two passages will suffice to make the point about Ryōshun's melancholy: "Though arriving now at Settsu province's Akutagawa river, I feared what would happen to my dust-like existence"; and: "if in this early morning departure my sleeve was moistened by drops of water from an oar while crossing the [Katsura] river, I am made aware of how much more so [it will be] on the far road to Awaji" (Inada 1992, p. 4).

16 O'Neill 1973.

建武式目) and its addenda (*tsuikahō* 追加法) reveal the Ashikaga to have been conservative and reactionary, desirous of establishing another shogunate to serve the court much as the Hōjō had done during the regency of Hōjō Yasutoki 北条泰時 (1183–1242), promulgator of the *Goseibai* formulary (*Goseibai shikimoku* 御成敗式目).<sup>17</sup> Few warriors could have predicted the scale of Go-Daigo's reforms, and in the end it was his rejection of a strong organ of warrior government that prompted the Ashikaga brothers to rebel.

Despite their relative success, a number of competing interests rendered the Ashikaga unable to fully establish their authority across the archipelago. Without a strong central authority, *tozama* warlords found it easier than ever to sell their services to the highest bidder, resulting in an unstable milieu wherein the strong—usually *shugo* daimyo—devoured the weak, a terrifying reality considering Japan was ruled by men for whom violence was the rule, not the exception. Preventing such a development was behind the decision to send Ryōshun to Kyushu.

Understanding how Ryōshun tried to use tighter bonds of loyalty to forge a connection between Kyushu and Kyoto requires a general appreciation of just how fragile bonds between lords and followers were during Japan's medieval period. The medieval concept of loyalty is best defined by the term *chūsetsu* 忠節, which is typically translated as service, in order to emphasize its contractual nature. Vassalage was built upon the foundations of mutual benefit, or a contract of debt (*go'on* 御恩) and service, wherein the most generous lords were more likely to prevail over their peers.<sup>18</sup> Service can thus be characterized by its conditionality and flexibility and loyalty by its connotations of permanency and impersonal obligation.<sup>19</sup> Loyalty in the unconditional sense was a later phenomenon, beginning with its transformation from an expression of a warrior's self-determination (*jiriki kyūsai* 自力救済) into the impersonal sort demanded by the rigid chain of command necessary for the great military campaigns of the sixteenth century, and culminating in what I term the age of unconditional loyalty that was the Tokugawa period.<sup>20</sup>

Ryōshun seems to have accurately diagnosed the conditional nature of service as inimical to socio-political stability, the title of *shugo* and his own service as a shogunal administrator giving him unique insight into the general concerns of warriors and how they viewed service.<sup>21</sup> He would have been acutely aware of the voracious appetite warriors had for lands and other emoluments, and hence understood that any hegemonic state would need to acknowledge and use that desire as the carrot that would help avoid, as much as possible, reliance on the stick.

Important here is that Ryōshun and his father appear to have considered self-sacrifice for a greater good an integral component of the lord-follower pact.<sup>22</sup> This is noteworthy in the age of conditional loyalty, when getting as much as one could for as little effort as

17 Grossberg 1981a, pp. 7, 15–16; Goble 1996, p. 263.

18 Ikegami 1997, p. 26.

19 Conlan 2003, pp. 143–44; Friday 2004, pp. 59–61; Hurst 1990, pp. 516–23.

20 Ikegami 1997, pp. 86–94.

21 For instance, Ryōshun used his understanding of warrior greed to manipulate *kokujin ikki* 国人一揆 associations into joining him to defeat his foes in Kyushu, most importantly the Shimazu. See Kawazoe 1964, pp. 61–70, 155–60.

22 “My father believed his action to be a great service, and the fact that he thought to put an end to a matter of great significance by sacrificing one of his children is not a secret, yet it is not recorded in the *Taiheiki*.” See Hasegawa 2008, p. 31. And as Conlan notes, “Not that death was a matter of great fear, because to die gloriously in battle meant that one's descendants would receive great rewards” (Conlan 2003, pp. 44–45).

possible was the rule, not the exception. *Nan Taiheiki*'s account of the conflict between Hosokawa Kiyouji 細川清氏 (?–1362) and the second Ashikaga shogun Yoshiakira clearly illustrate Ryōshun's ideas on the matter. It was whispered that Kiyouji harbored rebellious intentions and plans were made for his extirpation. And even though Ryōshun and his father Norikuni believed Kiyouji innocent of the charges, Norikuni put forth a plan to Yoshiakira whereby Kiyouji would be invited to Kyoto. There, Ryōshun would kill Kiyouji. Presumably, he would go along with his father's plan despite the fact that he and Kiyouji were friends.<sup>23</sup> While Ryōshun does express exasperation at his father's secrecy, he does not refute or criticize his father's decision.<sup>24</sup> In short, Norikuni put the public peace first and planned to sacrifice his son and a potentially innocent man to maintain it, while Ryōshun was willing to pursue a plan that could end up in his own death as the price for peace.

Sometimes sacrifice took the form of restraint. In this regard Ryōshun had a good model in Norikuni, who in his youth refused to inherit the Imagawa chieftainship despite his father's wish that he "should inherit everything."<sup>25</sup> In Ryōshun's case, he was one of the few *shugo* who resisted the temptation to pillage his province for extra wealth, instead using the office to extend Ashikaga authority rather than his own.<sup>26</sup> In short, self-sacrifice formed the basis for Ryōshun's goal of connecting Kyushu to Kyoto via a state-centric form of service.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, connecting the provinces to Kyoto necessitated a variety of new and unique measures.<sup>28</sup>

While in Kyushu, Ryōshun attempted to yoke warriors to the Ashikaga by creating a three-tiered hierarchy with a clear dialectic: those for the Ashikaga shoguns and those against, with himself as intermediary.<sup>29</sup> In a way, we might say that Ryōshun was trying to convert *tozama* warlords into *miuchi* 身内 of the Ashikaga. The latter were linked to their lord through blood, tradition, or both, and were thus generally more loyal than their *tozama* counterparts.<sup>30</sup> Ryōshun felt he could stabilize Kyushu by convincing its most powerful *tozama* warlords to become closely tied vassals of the Ashikaga. His intermediary role had precedent: in a sense he was setting himself up as a sort of neo-*zuryō* 受領, or bridging figure, whose presence would ensure the loyalty of Kyushu warriors and thus the stability of the island.

To that end he began by forging alliances with three of Kyushu's greatest warlords, Shōni Fuyusuke 少貳冬資 (?–1375), Ōtomo Chikayo 大友親世 (?–1418) and Shimazu Ujihisa 島津氏久 (1328–87), as well as with *ikki* 一揆 (of one mind) warrior alliances throughout Kyushu. The latter were the men of the provinces (*kokujin* 国人) who swore loyalty to the shogun and vowed to treat Ryōshun as the shogun's official representative. In return, they

23 Regarding Kiyouji, Ryōshun says, "I do not believe Kiyouji truly had any ambitions. Someone slandered him, having thoughts to rise beyond his station and go against the wishes of the shogun" (Hasegawa 2006, p. 33).

24 *gongo dōdan no koto nariki* 言語同断の事なりき (Hasegawa 2008, p. 31).

25 Hasegawa 2006, p. 438.

26 Kawazoe 1964, pp. 70–74.

27 "[Hegemony] mainly refers to a situation of subordination of both individuals and groups. Subordination entails a relation of domination by which the subjects are deprived of their self-reliance as persons as well as citizens. It denotes a factual condition of powerlessness and a representation of oneself as an impotent hostage in the hands of an ineffable destiny" (Urbinate 1998, p. 370).

28 For instance, Ashikaga Yoshimitsu installed a prototype of the *sankin kōtai* 参勤交代 system used to keep daimyo in check during the Tokugawa period. See Grossberg 1981a, pp. 5–6.

29 Kawazoe 1964, pp. 146–48.

30 Conlan 2003, pp. 130–40, 164.



were accorded vassal (*gokenin* 御家人) status, which gave them a distinct advantage over their non *gokenin* peers.<sup>31</sup> For Ryōshun, their swearing to serve the shogun was paramount for his goal—he continually stressed his role as shogunal intermediary in letters to them—whereas *kokujin* were motivated by the authority they gained vis-à-vis their rivals.<sup>32</sup>

Time would prove that Ryōshun had just the right mix of idealism and pragmatism to make things work. By the late 1380s Kyushu was mostly under his control, though he experienced some bumps along the way.<sup>33</sup> Take the well-known example of Shōni Fuyusuke. Fuyusuke used his relationship with Ryōshun to mobilize local warriors, unilaterally appropriating lands in order to improve his position vis-à-vis other Kyushu warriors. Such shortsighted but entirely predictable acts hindered Ryōshun's progress. Worse still, Fuyusuke was rumored to be seeking an alliance with the Southern Court after Ryōshun checked his attempt. Ryōshun's hierarchy could not countenance such disobedience, prompting him to have his younger brother Nakaaki cut down Fuyusuke at a banquet. Perhaps Ryōshun assumed that his victory over Prince Kaneyoshi would have convinced these warlords of the value of his policy and that such an extreme gesture would make his point clear; on the contrary, it caused the Ōtomo and the Shimazu to lose faith in him, and in the short term hindered his progress toward regional hegemony.<sup>34</sup>

Even though *tozama* warlords resisted the notion that their allegiance was compulsory, Ryōshun's ability to discern and utilize *tozama* and *kokujin* self-interest as a means of linking them to the shogunate was outstanding and led to his overall success in Kyushu, something achieved by none of the *tandai* before or after him. This undoubtedly reinforced his belief that peace was the natural consequence of a hierarchy in which lords and independent warriors were joined in a bond reminiscent of that existing between lords and their *miuchi* followers. Sadly, he would come to realize that his dreams of peace were just that, for his success bred a number of foes ready to pounce the moment he revealed any weakness. That moment would come in 1395, when the septuagenarian general was summarily dismissed from the post of *tandai* and recalled to the capital.

### Part 3: Burning Bridges—Ryōshun, Yoshimitsu, and the Ōei Disturbance

The stage would be set for Ryōshun's downfall in 1392, when the political situation changed following the death of Hosokawa Yoriyuki and the surrender of the Southern Court. The Ōtomo and Ōuchi families both had designs on the office of Kyushu *tandai*. Though ostensibly allied with Ryōshun, they had long resented the intrusion of external powers and worked behind the scenes to weaken him.<sup>35</sup> In Kyoto, struggles over the office of shogunal

31 Harrington 1985, p. 87. The members of the *ikki* swore a “god water pact” (*shinsui keijō* 神水契状), in which the principals wrote out an oath, burnt it, mixed it with water and drank it. See Kawazoe 1964, pp. 141–44.

32 Harrington 1985, p. 86.

33 The Shōni and the Shimazu had been thorns in Ryōshun's side since he murdered Fuyusuke in 1375. However, he had mostly conquered the Shōni by 1387 and Shimazu Ujihisa, one of Ryōshun's greatest foes in Kyushu, passed away in the same year, leaving little in the way of major resistance. See Kawazoe 1964, pp. 155–60.

34 Conlan 2003, p. 163.

35 Ryōshun appears to have been aware of their skullduggery: “Unfortunately, the recent events and those of Kyushu were entirely Ōuchi's doing, as well as the reason behind my being recalled [from Kyushu]. Speaking on this matter, the folk of Kyushu believed me to be partial and dishonest and thus avoided me because the shogun's will went against their expectations” (Hasegawa 2008, pp. 46–48).

regent witnessed a changing of the guard when Shiba Yoshiyuki 斯波義将 (1350–1410) became shogunal regent after Yoriyuki's death.<sup>36</sup> No doubt related to this, a member of the Shibukawa family named Mitsuyori 満頼, a cousin of Yoshimitsu's and related to Yoshiyuki by marriage, assumed that position after Ryōshun's dismissal.<sup>37</sup> It was a sudden reversal of fortune, as only a few months prior he had been given a document tacitly reinforcing his authority over Kyushu.<sup>38</sup>

Looking back, Ryōshun's dismissal should not be surprising. Ashikaga Yoshimitsu's reign was marked by an autocratic approach and a consistent arrogation of authority at the expense of other powerful warlords, especially those of the *shugo* class, who had vast opportunities to garner wealth and largesse by using the half-tax (*hanzei* 半済)

laws that the shogunate had implemented first in 1352 and then more broadly in 1368.

This was essential to fashioning hierarchies of authority that would mark the rise of the *shugo* daimyo and later, the *sengoku* daimyo during the realpolitik of the sixteenth century often referred to by the term *gekokujo* 下剋上, or the “low overturning the high.”<sup>39</sup> It is worth noting that Ryōshun himself used this technique liberally in his attempts to solidify control of Kyushu, which in the long run could not have endeared him to Yoshimitsu.<sup>40</sup>

While Yoshimitsu might have feared *shugo* who achieved autonomy, what he truly dreaded were blood relatives who possessed both autonomy and symbolic capital, making them potential rivals. Ryōshun was related to the Ashikaga *and* a *shugo*, and as Kyushu *tandai* had an island of quarrelsome warriors potentially at his disposal. In short, he was the most dangerous sort of foe for any would-be hegemony.

Yoshimitsu was not entirely out of bounds in dismissing Ryōshun. Exigency had compelled him to exploit his rights and responsibilities vis-à-vis distributing rewards in order to gather followers—the aforementioned *hanzei* was one of his primary techniques, and one common to *shugo* of the time.<sup>41</sup> First, even though Ryōshun was forced to adopt such tactics due to lack of resources, one can see how Yoshimitsu might have assumed the worst: he was



Figure 2. Portrait of Ashikaga Yoshimitsu. Courtesy of Rokuonji temple.

36 Yoshiyuki is also read as Yoshimasa.

37 The Shibukawa family, incidentally, was one of those originally sent to subjugate Kyushu prior to Ryōshun, who complains about the Shibukawa at the end of *Nan Taiheiki*. See Hasegawa 2008, pp. 47–48.

38 This document had seven conditions, and gave Ryōshun more latitude in adjudicating warrior land claims and suits. The fourth, however, reveals the degree of the Ashikaga's mistrust of Ryōshun, for it divested him of his authority to award *kanjō* 感状 (documents of appreciation for service). Such documents were critical for retaining a follower's fealty, and without them he was unable to give official, personal thanks for warrior service, a valuable tool Ryōshun had relied on to build relationships during his tenure. As one can imagine, receiving such documents was a great honor, as well as a way that a warlord with the proper credentials (such as Ryōshun) and ambitions to carve out a sphere of autonomy might entice warriors to his cause. In short, while bolstering his ability to act as their representative, the Ashikaga had simultaneously denuded him of one of his most valuable tools for maintaining his personal authority. See Harrington 1985, p. 89; Kawazoe 1964, pp. 209–211.

39 Wintersteen 1974, pp. 214–20.

40 Harrington 1985, pp. 87–88.

41 Harrington 1985, pp. 85–91.

far removed from the realities of Ryōshun's situation and was worried about losing his grip on the ever-recalcitrant *shugo* class. Second, Yoshimitsu lived in the harsh political maelstrom of Kyoto and was therefore subject to political machinations about which Ryōshun would have had scant knowledge and even less potential to influence. Third, Yoshimitsu had little personal contact with Ryōshun during the latter's time in Kyushu, a prerequisite for developing trust between warriors in the age of conditional loyalty. Finally, it certainly could not have helped that a number of Kyushu warriors had their own agendas and slandered Ryōshun to further their own interests, undoubtedly influencing Yoshimitsu's opinion. Taking all this into account, it is unlikely that Yoshimitsu would have perceived Ryōshun's actions as motivated by fidelity, even though his track record as a public official, his testimony in *Nan Taiheiki*, and the personal qualities evident in the *Letter*, paint him as a man of high ideals. The question we must now confront is why he contemplated rebellion, and furthermore, why he disavowed his participation when evidence suggests he did actually participate.

In addition to his dismissal from the post of *tandai*, two events in particular appear to have convinced Ryōshun that Yoshimitsu needed to be deposed. First, he planned to meet directly with Yoshimitsu and defend himself against the slander of his Kyushu foes, hoping that his years of service would earn him an audience. In this he was disappointed, as Yoshimitsu refused the meeting.<sup>42</sup> If this was vexing, worse yet was Ryōshun's nephew Yasunori 康範 convincing Yoshimitsu to award him half of Ryōshun's hereditary landholding of Suruga province. Previously, Hosokawa Yoriyuki had refused Yasunori's request, citing a "lack of precedent";<sup>43</sup> Yoshimitsu, however, acquiesced to Yasunori's request, emboldening the latter to request Tōtōmi 遠江 province as well. Yasunori's behavior and Yoshimitsu's biased adjudication demoralized Ryōshun.<sup>44</sup> The desire of the shogun in the east (Kantō kubō 関東公方) Ashikaga Ujimitsu 足利氏満 and later his son Mitsukane 満兼 (1378–1409) to become shogun would provide Ryōshun with an opportunity to settle the score.<sup>45</sup>

Following the death of Ujimitsu in 1398, his son Mitsukane and Ōuchi Yoshihiro plotted to rebel against the Ashikaga. Mitsukane, like his father, possessed the bloodline, symbolic capital, wealth, and power base to threaten Yoshimitsu's rule.

Yoshihiro, on the other hand, was a great power in Kyushu who aspired to control the island. Like Ryōshun, he was a contributor to the establishment of Ashikaga authority, defeating Yamana Ujikiyo 山名氏清 (1344–92) in the Meitoku Disturbance of 1391.

He participated in the defeat of a Southern Court army later that year, and in the following year convinced the Southern Court to relinquish the imperial regalia, thereby

42 "I thought that I could put Yoshimitsu at ease over the matter of Kyushu if I could just go to the capital and clear everything up, but in the end he would not listen to me, likely because those in Kyushu had long whispered of my dishonesty" (Hasegawa 2008, p. 46).

43 *yo no tameshi ni koso mōseshi ga* 世の例にこそ申せしが (Hasegawa 2008, p. 28).

44 Ryōshun laments: "Oh, if only Yasunori had not requested Suruga province, we would not have experienced sorrow at such duplicity" (Hasegawa 2008, p. 28).

45 A short note on the acrimony between the shogun in Kyoto and his counterpart in Kamakura, the Kantō kubō, is in order. Regarding the latter, Ryōshun discussed its origins at length in *Nan Taiheiki*. Ashikagas Takauji and Tadayoshi foresaw the potential for abuses and uprisings and hoped that ceding the east to Ashikaga Motouji, the fourth of Takauji's sons, would prevent chicanery by other members of the Ashikaga family, as well as by other powerful individuals, primarily those of the *shugo* class. They were mistaken, for while the Kantō kubō was meant to bolster the shogun's authority in the east, members of the Ashikaga who filled the post would almost certainly use it as a stepping-stone to further autonomy. Animosity between the shogun and the Kantō kubō persisted until Ashikaga Shigeuji 足利成氏 abandoned the post in 1455. For Ryōshun's account in *Nan Taiheiki*, see Hasegawa 2008, pp. 38–39.

affecting its surrender. Despite Yoshihiro's dedicated service, the *Ōeiki* 応永記 (Record of Ōei) states that he decided to raise the standard of rebellion because it was rumored that Yoshimitsu had ordered his destruction. And when Yoshimitsu sent the monk Zekkai Chūshin 絶海中津 (1334–1405) to treat with Yoshihiro, he explained three grievances behind his decision to rebel.<sup>46</sup> While appearing reasonable, Yoshimitsu, desiring to curtail the authority of *shugo* like Yoshihiro, refused to relent. Thus Yoshihiro set out for battle on 13 October 1399, but he was quickly defeated and forced to commit suicide on 21 December 1399. His erstwhile co-conspirator Mitsukane surrendered soon after, bringing the so-called Ōei Disturbance to a premature end.

Yoshimitsu, wanting to become the locus of political power, could not countenance the relinquishing of authority to anyone, and men like Ryōshun and Yoshihiro who helped establish that authority now threatened his rule and had thus become expendable. Yoshimitsu's dreams of grandeur even led him to consider what others before him such as Taira no Kiyomori had considered: adoption into or supplanting of the imperial family. Post retirement Yoshimitsu would take the title of chancellor of the realm (*dajō daijin* 太政大臣) and demand rights accorded a retired emperor, with the goal of either marrying his children into the imperial line or supplanting it entirely.<sup>47</sup> It was such lofty dreams that brought him into conflict with collaterals and *shugo* alike.

Warriors had long found the dictatorial approach unpalatable: the first shogunate had been founded on the premise that it was a conglomeration of competing warrior interests. Minamoto Yoritomo 源頼朝 (1147–99) struggled to balance those interests and did not seek to become a dictator. The shogunal ideal was the very opposite, in fact: their lordship was predicated on munificence and judiciousness. Even members of the court disliked despotism. Kitabatake Akiie 北畠顕家 (1318–38), one of Go-Daigo's ablest commanders and son of the renowned Southern Court



Figure 3. *Kaō* 花押 (autograph seal) of Ashikaga Mitsukane. Mochizuki Kakusen, *Kaō tsuzuri, kaō sōran* 花押つづり・花押総覧. <http://homepage2.nifty.com/kaou/souran/e-kaou/kaou-s/kaou-s04.html>. Viewed 30 September 2015.



Figure 4. Portrait of Ōuchi Yoshihiro. *Rekishi jinbutsu gazō dētabēsu* 歴史人物画像データベース. Available online at Kokubungaku Kenkyū Shiryōkan 国文学研究資料館.

46 First, it was rumored that Yoshimitsu had ordered the Ōuchi's enemies, the Shōni and the Kikuchi, to kill him; second there was, Yoshimitsu's attainer of a number of Yoshihiro's provinces; and third was the lack of rewards for his son, who had died in battle with the Shōni at Yoshimitsu's behest. See *Ōeiki*, pp. 303–304.

47 Yoshimitsu's intent has been much debated. Some see him as arrogating imperial prerogative as a means of trying to become emperor. See Yamamura and Imatani 1992, pp. 69–74. Others like Conlan believe that because Yoshimitsu was treated as an emperor that he was in effect emperor. See Conlan 2011b, pp. 171–86.

leader Kitabatake Chikafusa 北畠親房 (1293–1354), harshly remonstrated with Go-Daigo for his maladministration, laying out seven points that contributed to unrest, almost all of which were also hallmarks of Yoshimitsu's administration.<sup>48</sup> Responses toward autocratic governance were also harsh, marked by remonstrance, retirement, or rebellion. We should not be surprised at the similarities: both Ryōshun and Chikafusa were prominent Confucian intellectuals, and Akiie's intellectual makeup resembled his father's.<sup>49</sup> Their common background would mark the way in which each resisted his respective leader's turn toward despotism.

On the surface, the Ōei Disturbance appears a simple conflict between Yoshimitsu and an upstart family member allied with a disgruntled warlord. Ryōshun informs us in *Nan Taiheiki* that Yoshihiro, afraid his land rights would be subject to attainder, tried to recruit him. However, Ryōshun insists he refused the offer.<sup>50</sup> We should not accept uncritically his explanation, however, as other evidence suggests that his actions may not have been so black and white.<sup>51</sup> First, it seems that Ryōshun acted as go-between for Yoshihiro and Mitsukane at some point in 1398 or early 1399.<sup>52</sup> Second, after Yoshimitsu ordered Ryōshun's death, he mobilized family members and followers with the intent to rebel, though he surrendered soon after.<sup>53</sup> And third, Ryōshun claims he subsequently retired to his home in Fujisawa because he came to believe that Mitsukane did not think to revolt for the sake of the realm.<sup>54</sup> This last is most important, for it suggests not only that Ryōshun chose the traditional Confucian method of remonstrance through retirement, but also that he wanted to follow a man of conviction who would “preserve for all time the fortunes of the Ashikaga and give stability to the people.”<sup>55</sup>

Perhaps we have been posing the wrong question when we ask why Ryōshun might betray. Perhaps the better question is this: what if he did not believe he was guilty of an act of betrayal? As Kitamura Masayuki has argued, Ryōshun was no stranger to reinterpreting the definition of betrayal, so we should consider the possibility that he did not believe he was betraying the Ashikaga, but deposing a bad ruler—Yoshimitsu, the man who had fallen from what Ryōshun saw as the “way of heaven” (*tendō* 天道).<sup>56</sup> *Nan Taiheiki* presents the following excoriation of Yoshimitsu:

48 In order: 1) lack of concern for the North and Kyushu; 2) exorbitant taxes; 3) improper advancements of court rank; 4) unfair distribution of land awards; 5) extreme sumptuary expenditures; 6) unfair application of laws; and 7) a reliance on individuals interested in self gain. See section titled “Restoration's Setback” (“Shinsei no zasetsu” 新政の挫折) in Satō 1965.

49 Marra 1985, pp. 330–36.

50 “Why should you lose your provinces and lands if together we continue to serve Yoshimitsu with greater loyalty?” (Hasegawa 2008, p. 46).

51 Ryōshun seems to suggest that he at least agreed with Ujimitsu, Mitsukane's father, on the matter of Yoshimitsu's immorality. For example: “As for recent events, we decided when we went to Tōtōmi only to look up to someone from among the Ashikaga who we believed would pursue correct government, since this was Lord Takauji's wish” (Hasegawa 2008, p. 39).

52 *Kamakura ōzōshi* 鎌倉大草子 clearly states that Ryōshun was disgruntled due to Yoshimitsu's handling of things and eventually capitulated to Yoshihiro's invitations. Kawazoe 1964, pp. 224–25.

53 An entry in *Sondō shinnō gyōjō* 尊道親王行状 for 4 July 1400 reads: “The foes in Tōtōmi, Kunai no shōbu nyūdō and Hoshino, were defeated, and Imagawa Iyo nyūdō [Ryōshun] surrendered” (Kawazoe 1964, pp. 228–29).

54 *sate wa Kamakura dono no, tenka no tame ni hitasura oboshimeshitatsu koto wa nakari keri to zōji shikaba* 偕は鎌倉殿の、天下の為に混思召立事はなかりけりと存じしかば (Hasegawa 2008, p. 39).

55 *gotōke go'un chōkyū to ii, bannin, ando o nasu beki ni ya to omou narishi nari* 御当家御運長久と云ひ、万人、安堵をなすべきにやと思ふなりしなり (Hasegawa 2008, p. 38).

56 Kitamura 2010, pp. 16–21.

At the time, Ashikaga Mitsukane lamented that “Yoshimitsu’s government was biased toward certain people, and so some powerful individual might in the end surface to steal the realm [from the Ashikaga]; would it not be better [to have it taken by someone in the family] than some unrelated individual?” The concept of “rebellion for the sake of the realm and its people” is widely accepted. Had Yoshimitsu changed his mind entirely—even had he not focused wholly on good government—why would such thoughts have occurred to Mitsukane if Yoshimitsu had but ceased his recent evils and waylessness, and instead worked toward quelling the people’s grievances? Lately everyone seems to speak of some grudge against Yoshimitsu, yet his destiny is strong and his authority is absolute. Accordingly, if his administration was correct even but a little, who indeed would have joined their hearts with Mitsukane?

Yoshimitsu even now commonly performs prayers out of fear, and it is rumored that maledictions for the subjugation of the Kantō are being performed. I believe that if he would do away with prayers and sorcery and concentrate even a little on how to govern properly, he would immediately realize *the way of the realm* and the hearts of the Kami and Buddhas [italics added].<sup>57</sup>

From Ryōshun’s point of view Yoshimitsu was trying to bring peace to the realm by appeasing the kami and Buddhas through Shingon mysticism when his administrative experience and intellectual breadth told him that “the way of the realm,” which lay in quelling the people’s grievances, was more important.<sup>58</sup>

*Nan Taiheiki*’s language—in particular that in the passage above—carries a distinctly Chinese-Confucian tone that suggests that the “way of the realm” lay in respecting established social hierarchies. We know from his time in Kyushu that this was Ryōshun’s ideal.<sup>59</sup> Moreover, he says he lost everything by acting in an “old-fashioned” spirit.<sup>60</sup> For fourteenth century Japanese, the ideals of Chinese-style governance were ancient and perhaps seen as outdated, even if fresh currents had been coming into vogue.<sup>61</sup> Still, the fact that such

57 Hasegawa 2008, p. 35.

58 Conlan 2011b, pp. 177–80.

59 His ideas can be summed up with the following passage: “When I consider the circumstances, I exerted myself in vain because I foolishly thought of past connections and duty, and I lament having wasted the honor and wealth I accrued over long years. The truth about my time in Kyushu is simply that I did not know my place. Though I was not necessarily as favored by or as close as others to Yoshimitsu, I put my own concerns aside entirely and, having been ordered above all to pacify the west entrusted myself to that decision, all because I thought only to do my duty for the Ashikaga. Not in their wildest dreams did my followers think that I would lose hundreds of relatives and housemen, my honor, and now even my hereditary lands as a result. Men ought to perform loyal service according to their rank, for others will become resentful of those who perform service above their station” (Hasegawa 2008, p. 40).

60 *mukashigokoro nite* 昔心にて. Though we do not have a record of the works Ryōshun studied throughout his life, he was one of the foremost Confucian scholars of his time, and thus we can inductively suggest that he was eminently familiar with most strains of Chinese political theory and their relationship to the intellectual climate of his time. Andrew Goble has two fascinating summaries of that climate. The first is in an article on Emperor Hanazono’s *Kaitaishi sho* 誡太子書 (Admonitions to the Crown Prince); the second is his monograph titled *Kenmu: Go-Daigo’s Revolution*. See Goble 1995; Goble 1996, pp. 20–29.

61 Some notable examples of individuals who approached Confucian learning from new angles include the Southern Court ideologue Kitabatake Chikafusa, who had a deep knowledge of *Mencius*. For him, the notions of “virtuous government” (*tokusei* 徳政) and “virtuous ruler, peaceful people” (*kuntoku anmin* 君徳安民) were central. Madenokōji Nobufusa 万里小路宣房, who later joined the Northern Court, also relied on Mencian thought on revolutionary reign change (*ekisei kakumei* 易姓革命), wherein an immoral ruler could rightfully be destroyed by his followers, to criticize his former ruler Go-Daigo. Finally, Ashikaga Yoshimitsu himself heard lectures on *Mencius* from the famed Zen priest Gidō Shūshin 義堂周信. See Itō 1997, pp. 62–63; Inoue 1972, pp. 266–83.

ideals were rhetorically ancient but realistically distant would explain why his contemporaries ultimately rejected his hierarchical vision of the world as too alien from their reality.

Chinese-Confucian rhetoric formed the lexical and intellectual basis from which medieval Japanese drew ideas on governance, and so we should not be surprised that Ryōshun's did too. Here I would like to posit that the basis of his thought regarding rebellion came from *Mencius*.<sup>62</sup> While in Kyushu he commonly dealt with monks traveling to and from the continent.<sup>63</sup> Such individuals were typically of the Five Mountains (*gozan* 五山) Zen establishment, which was known for its reliance on Sung Neo-Confucianism, which had a special affinity for the moral arguments of Mencius.<sup>64</sup> Some caution is required, for while Ryōshun explicitly refers to *Mencius* on several occasions in the *Letter*, there is no such mention in *Nan Taiheiki*. And yet he draws on ideas that bear striking similarities to three important Mencian notions: the “way of kings” (*ōdō* 王道), the “way of despots” (*badō* 霸道), and the “stability of the people” (*banmin ando* 万民安堵). The “way of kings” places great value on hierarchy, social harmony, and balancing the needs of the people, referred to by the phrase *banmin ando*. The “way of despots,” conversely, describes governance through selfishness, personal bias, and a lack of concern for established precedent and hierarchy, ultimately sowing discord among the people. In other words, the moral king was generous and worked to create harmony between clearly defined social tiers, while the despot merely aggrandized his own status and wealth regardless of precedent or custom, and often at the expense of the people.

The suggestion of Ryōshun's reliance on *Mencius*, toward which Japanese intellectuals had traditionally been hostile, is noteworthy, as Mencian rhetoric provided a way to justify both the Ashikaga's conquest of the Southern Court and Ryōshun's own distaste for, and rebellion against, Yoshimitsu's regime. In the former case, the Ashikaga contributed to the defeat of an immoral ruler in Go-Daigo, while in the latter case Ryōshun could argue that deposing Yoshimitsu, whom he also considered an immoral ruler, was not a betrayal of the Ashikaga. If Ryōshun's attempt at forging stronger bonds of loyalty presaged a new type of warrior hierarchy, then his concern with the Ashikaga house is also representative of an increased focus on the “primacy of the whole extended warrior house (rather than its members), with its history and its texts, as the repository of attachments and the object of loyalty.”<sup>65</sup>

Ryōshun also refers to other ideas based in *Mencius*, such as the “mandate of heaven” (*tenmei* 天命) and the “heaven's heavenly way” (*tenka no tenka taru michi* 天下の天下たる道), as a basis for his criticism of Yoshimitsu. Interestingly, the mandate of heaven, by which a lord's reign was justified by heaven as long as peace and harmony prevailed, and “revolutionary reign change” (*ekisei kakumei* 易姓革命), which argued that a ruler who failed in that duty had lost said mandate and thus could be deposed, are explicit in *Taiheiki*.<sup>66</sup> It may be that Ryōshun chose to target *Taiheiki* not just because it provided a means of correcting the historical record but also because he agreed with much of the

62 As a Zen monk, Ryōshun had to be familiar with the intellectual trends of his sect. Zen, as it so happens, was the primary means by which Song Neo-Confucian thought, which prioritized *Mencius*, came to Japan. See Inoue 1972, pp. 217–32.

63 Kawazoe 1964, pp. 167–69.

64 Collcutt 1996, p. 97.

65 Spafford 2009, p. 322.

66 Mass 1998, pp. 328–30

work's viewpoint, which is distinctly Confucian in outlook.<sup>67</sup> Ryōshun himself maintains that [*Taiheiki*'s] content is overall correct, despite the many falsehoods about the merit of various individuals.<sup>68</sup> Could it be that *Taiheiki* was doubly important because his support of the main narrative provided a basis for his criticism of Yoshimitsu, who appeared to be following a similar path as Emperor Go-Daigo, whom *Taiheiki* also excoriates as a despot? It is an intriguing possibility that deserves further attention.

Another indicator of Ryōshun's understanding of *Mencius* is his reference to the concept of heaven, earth, and man (*ten chi jin* 天地人). *Mencius* prioritizes man, stating that "Heaven's seasons are less crucial than earth's advantages and earth's advantages less crucial than human accord."<sup>69</sup> In other words, man's reason trumps the unpredictable vicissitudes of heaven, while at the same time the advantage of earth is entirely dependent on reason to ascertain the tactical advantages of terrain. Ryōshun echoes this theory as a means of conceptualizing Yoshimitsu's faults:

Thinking of this in terms of the triad of Heaven, Earth, and Man, the advantage of heaven resides in dates and timing, auspicious directions, and the nature of an individual by birth; is not the advantage of heaven simply using what is beneficial? The advantage of earth is nothing more than placing impregnable mountains, seas, and other defensible areas to your front, as well as fortifying oneself in a good stronghold. The advantage of mankind is reason. Just as it is said that if the hearts of all people are in accordance with reason, then the advantages of heaven and earth will become unnecessary, if all the people of Japan give thanks for the blessings of their lord with one heart, then would even one villain be born? Then His Lordship's prayers would be answered naturally. Though he seeks to accomplish deeds through prayer, what good will secret rites do if His Lordship's mind is filled with evil and immorality?<sup>70</sup>

In other words, if Yoshimitsu had based his judgments on reason when considering merit and loyalty, rather than on transient advantages (as Ryōshun undoubtedly felt was the case when Yoshimitsu dismissed him from the post of Kyushu *tandai*), then the need to rely on heaven and earth would be obviated and society would naturally be at peace.

If *Mencius* was the fountainhead for Ryōshun's criticism of Yoshimitsu, then it stands to reason that *Mencius* provided a justification for his participation in Mitsukane's plot. Consider the following passage:

We decided when we went to Tōtōmi only to put our trust in someone from among the Ashikaga whom we believed would pursue correct government, since this was Lord

67 Mori Shigeaki believes that *Taiheiki* is ultimately a Confucian work. He has a point, in that it makes value judgments primarily through reference to Chinese history and Confucian morality, establishing both at the outset as the baseline for value judgments (Mori 1991, p. 17). Indeed, the introduction to *Taiheiki* lays out what is clearly a Confucian baseline for judging the morality of rulers, using Chinese parallels to outline ethical governance, a strategy that continues throughout the entire work. See *Taiheiki*'s introduction in Hasegawa 1998, p. 19.

68 See note 5.

69 The line to which Ryōshun refers comes from book 2B of *Mencius*. For an English translation, see Bloom and Ivanhoe 2009, p. 38.

70 Hasegawa 2008, pp. 35–36.



Takauji's wish. But around the time when it was clear that a force would be sent from Kyoto, I heard that Uesugi strongly urged Ashikaga Mitsukane to make peace with Yoshimitsu. I knew then that Mitsukane did not think to revolt for the sake of the realm and so, respectful of Kyoto's judgment, I retired of my own volition to Fujisawa and stayed there, thinking that my children should be of assistance to Yoshimitsu and Mitsukane.<sup>71</sup>

A reliance on Mencian thought as a justification for Ryōshun's participation in rebellion is understandable, since what compelled him was not, as he says, "selfishness according to the times" (*toki ni aeba hito no kashira o konomu* 時に逢えば人の頭を尚む), but a moral imperative to depose an immoral ruler. Using this rhetoric Ryōshun was able to work against Yoshimitsu while remaining loyal to the Ashikaga family.<sup>72</sup> Casting rebellion in moral terms seems to have been a hallmark of the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries when, as David Spafford argues, "the retrospective rational and self-serving omissions speak not only of a calculus of personal advantage, I contend, but of the murk and uncertainty of an age in which the rending of social fabric was an all-too-frequent possibility."<sup>73</sup> Ryōshun's account in *Nan Taiheiki* reflects an acute awareness of the flexible nature of history and memory, and the ease with which they could be recast.

Ryōshun's criticism of Yoshimitsu is apparent: had the latter endeavored to earn the loyalty of powerful warriors through moral governance rather than by subjugating any and all who threatened him, he might have prevented rebellions like that of Mitsukane and Yoshihiro. For Ryōshun, the "mandate of heaven" and "revolutionary dynastic change" allowed for an immoral ruler such as Yoshimitsu to be deposed without endangering the Ashikaga dynasty. Hence Ryōshun did not consider his participation, whatever the degree, in the Ōei Disturbance as a betrayal, so much as an ethical action meant to save a society for which he had sacrificed so much to help build.

In the end, however, the rebellion failed and he was forced to retire. Ryōshun's life was spared when the Kantō deputy Uesugi Norisada 上杉憲定 (1375–1413) and, oddly enough, the aforementioned monk-turned-layman Yasunori interceded with Yoshimitsu on Ryōshun's behalf.<sup>74</sup> His bridges burnt with Yoshimitsu's regime, he retired with little left but his literary reputation, devoting the remainder of his life to poetry and literary criticism and remaining apart from the political realm of the Ashikaga that he helped forge.

71 Hasegawa 2008, p. 39.

72 The following passage will suffice to make the point: "Because Yoshimitsu's government was biased toward certain people, some powerful individual might in the end surface to steal the realm from the Ashikaga; would it not be better [to have it taken by someone in the family] than some unrelated individual" (Hasegawa 2008, p. 35).

73 Spafford 2009, pp. 322–23.

74 Kawazoe 1964, pp. 229–30.

## Conclusion

I have argued that Ryōshun's time as Kyushu *tandai* reflects his attempt to create an Ashikaga hegemony to instill order on a society deteriorating into chaos. Integral to this was bridging the gap between private lordship and public by fostering a relationship with independent warlords reminiscent of the ties they had with their *miuchi* followers. This method is representative of that which *sengoku* daimyo and the Tokugawa after them would use to fashion hierarchies of authority. It is clear then that even as early as the fourteenth century warlords understood that the greatest guarantor of stability was restricting the autonomy of one's followers. While Ryōshun's method presaged later attempts to foster and maintain order, his goal was fundamentally conservative: reinforcing the current central authority while preserving what little order remained. However, his conservative nature put him at odds with Ashikaga Yoshimitsu, whose absolutist tendencies would not allow collaterals a place at the political table. Yoshimitsu's despotism caused Ryōshun to consider rebellion, a decision he was able to justify through *Mencius*. Mencius' notion of reign change allowed Ryōshun to criticize his lord's immorality, while still supporting the Ashikaga dynasty.

Ryōshun was remembered mostly because his *Letter* espoused behavior that was easily understood as moral according to Tokugawa period ideals. However, his *Nan Taiheiki* sheds light on an altogether different side of his personality: that of the disgruntled rebel. If I am correct that the ethics of *Mencius* gave him ideological justification to rebel, his outlook was ironically consonant with the predominant ideology of the Tokugawa, who, because they were concerned primarily with controlling the obstreperous warrior class, were justifiably sensitive to reign change.<sup>75</sup> Ideologues and loyalists of the time, heavily influenced by Neo-Confucian ideals and interested in simple narratives of loyalty and rebellion, especially regarding the fourteenth century and the schism between the two imperial courts, would have been eminently uncomfortable with disloyalty on the part of a man considered a paragon of warrior ethics. Thus it is no surprise that *any* evidence implicating Ryōshun as a rebel, even one with a just cause, would have been ignored by those who lived in an era hungry for exemplars, real or imagined.

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